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Please, teacher, don't give me freedom

Contortionist pedagogies, Un-learning critical practices in architecture

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Synopsis

It seems now that students are afraid of taking decisions, of being free to decide. The problem it is not the university teaching method, but kindergarten and the school, society and education trends. Not training emotional abilities means we, professors of architecture, receive soldiers. Used to follow rules, not to decide. They suffer creating. And we try to motivate, turning everything upside down, making circus strategies and contortionist movements to make them committed and involved with the architectural project.

Our proposal has the aim to open a dialogue among professors. The hypothesis is to implement a methodology of learning in a way that we un-learn, change emotional responses, focused on having fun. The idea is to implement freedom in pedagogical methodologies. We try to make contortionist pedagogies, deforming and depicting old ways to learn, to make room for new critical practices used in the context of freedom.

Key words: Freedom, Un-learning, Pedagogies, Emotions, Critical learning.

1. Introduction

When playing twister, you must decide in which colour you put your foot, your hand, but no time to decide or you may fall. Tension and balance makes you take a decision. You are free to decide.

There seems to be a lack of commitment and intense production during past years in the school of architecture. Students seem not to be worried about design subjects, not being completely focused or involved in the task, and teachers find ourselves very often with the necessity of making an extra effort to motivate, to encourage, to provoke, or to define for them the project, the design. We believe that this worrisome question is related mainly to the personal affective situation of each student. The number of students of architecture that start going to visit a psychologist is increasing.

We are not sure whether teaching is a product or a process, but It should clearly indicate its constitutional elements, strategies, organizational and structural aspects. Pedagogy should reveal its objectives. Nevertheless, this issue has nothing to do with emotion and the affective side of the student. There is usually a lack of this sensible aspect, which in our opinion constitutes a solid background of the creative process.

2. State of Art

"Teaching is even more difficult than learning" (Heidegger, 1971, 20)

There is a tradition and an extended state of the art about what creativity is and how it should be addressed through learning processes. One of the first well-known attempt to conceptualize the creative process was by Wallas in 1926, although he did not identify specific processes, he articulated a four stages model about design thinking. This was structured within a sequenced linear protocol: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification. Therefore, in the second one, thoughts are supposed to roam in a free-ranging way. It is here that affective processes may play an especially important role. We don't practise with our students creativity pedagogies through linear processes; these four Wallas stages are usually subverted in our classroom.

One important issue is that of understand creativity as a scientific process, where a problem finding must be identified on an early stage (Arlin, 1986; Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976). Esta cuestión de reducir el proceso creativo a una resolución lógica deductiva afecta enormemente a los tanteos exploratorios que el estudiante, libremente, opera sobre el proyecto. A deep discussion of this issue can be found in Armbruster (1989).

We know a big deal about cognitive elements of the creative process, but we are just beginning to learn about the affective components of the creative process (Walker 1993: 9). The major question afforded on this paper is about fear on creativity process, and how these mechanisms involved in creativity are activated to defeat psychological block.

Sandra Walker's (1993) *Affect and creativity: The Role of Affect and Play in the Creative Process* describes some clues about the role of *affect and cognitive-affective duality* on interaction within children's play. *The Creative*

Process: Reflections on the Invention in the Arts and Sciences by Brewster Ghiselin is an anthology of literature that matches with some concepts explained in this text.

3. Hypothesis: to un _learn to open space to new knowledge

Our education system frame leads our students to follow rules, “it is a method of mental distortion, conductista, that push them to be good to fit in pre-established economic and social models” (Price, 2001, 39). We try to make them un-learn, so they can adapt to any situations, and develop the capacity of self-learning.

We try to work in assignments and methodologies that empower the student so there is an upside-down exchange of roles. We create a circus scenery to intensify the activity so the student is not really aware of what is happening, because it has something more exciting to care about. Teachers, as members of learning communities, must assume this affective tasks.

4. About the affective ecosystem on learning design pedagogy

...’You will write,’ she said, ‘if you will write without thinking of the result in terms of a result, but think of the writing in terms of discovery, which is to say that creation must take place between the pen and the paper, not before in a thought or afterwards in a recastifying. (...) It will come if it is there and if you will let it come.’ John Hyde Preston: a conversation with Gertrude Stein (Ghiselin 1985: 164)

The habits and routines that prompt the reactions of a designer immersed in a creative process are almost shaped along the first years of school. Emotion is specific, individual and conscious. In this sense of attitude, we notice a difference between students coming from traditional curricula schools and those who took constructive pedagogies within the childhood. The first group use to present different levels of ADD Affective Deficit Disorder in the classroom, but trained the seconds as a holistic subjects, without detriment to any cerebral hemisphere. This issue is seminal to avoid mental block in the creative process.

Faced with the encyclopedic knowledge teaching, the theory of social learning by Albert Bandura raises much of the teaching process on the social environment. In this approach, students observe, interact, acquire group experiences and diverse behaviors that can hardly be acquired individually. Strategies, attitudes and beliefs apprehended through these creative pedagogies implement high doses of affective information that enhance the student's disposition toward the design project.

The speculation of learning by observing what others do, and also the evaluation of human thinking processes, as fundamental to understanding personality, has as a consequence to bet on a pedagogies based on action. First act, then thinking.

However, in the case of teaching architectural design project -and in many others-, the physical environment of the classroom seems to be important to incorporate a special attunement on students learning process (Lamela 2016). This allow us to test a short of ecological learning theory, in the etymological

sense of Ernst Haeckel. This means a social learning that implements a special sensitivity towards the physical environment or habitat.

As usual in the Spanish university, we do not teach in Montessori 'landscape schools', but rather in places of enormous hierarchy and little flexibility. Therefore, we manage the configuration of the classroom as free space, a sum of potential social project (s) developed by the students. They design the learning ecosystem scenario for diverse pedagogical actions. This approach forces them to make a choice. The 'Independent Republic of the Classroom' entails high doses of fun, excitement and play.

4.1. Case studies

We can explain several situations related to learning environments, in the classroom or not, that follow this hypothesis of methodology. These situations are closer to kindergartens activities than university tasks, but the method is clear: there must be a strong willing to not think, to be free from others' opinion, empower yourself and be you. We recognise "intuition as the capacity of mental structure to recognise new and unexpected phenomena" (Heller, 1987, 149)

The way to teach creativity is a path to the children inside the student. This children has fade away with the time, and hidden behind masks. But we have to come back to that child, free and happy, that doesn't care about what others think about their first lines, that has no limits in his imagination.

Affective teaching through pedagogy display skills at creative curricula is our challenge as teachers. We have collected ten case studies carried out in the classroom of DAI 1 and 2 at ETSA Madrid, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid.

4.2. Approach to a unfinished decalogue:

1) Architects no longer work alone but collaboratively. Teamwork and timing under pressure are appropriate to strengthen this skill. When time is short and format is huge, the results are coming. This case (fig.1) was a collective painting done with brooms, where every 10 seconds a group of 10 students had to add a layer to the drawing, while trying to represent Cuenca's landscape: mountains, houses, sky, and stones.



Figure 1. Figure 2.

2) Enjoyment or funny pedagogies, focussing the addition of diverse issues that entertain students -Simpsons, graffiti, videogames, music...-.

Singing and Dancing project improved pedagogical objectives, students had to sing their ideas for a competition with a bachata song. They can be disguised. Lyrics, harmony, choreography were amazing. (Fig.2)

3) Abandonment of authorship and originality in favor of post-production dynamics, sampling and shared knowledge. There is always this kind of fear to the white paper, or to waste material, or to authorship; painture, ...this can be healed with huge papers and painting with the body, on it and over it. (Fig.3)



Figure 3.

4) Creative processes abandon the ancient operative logics to introduce actions prior to reflections: intuition as a form of knowledge. Doing, then thinking was the hypothesis of many pedagogies. Working with very cheap materials, doing random things without thinking is a way to start creative process without the rational part of the brain. Their creative impulse attempts to re-examine the elements of designing syntax. Authors falls down a derive through materiality and operative strategies. Surprises are guaranteed. (fig.4)



Figure 4.

Please, teacher, don't give me freedom
Ruiz Plaza, Angela; Amann Alcocer, Atxu; Roig Segobia, Eduardo

5) Without certainties. Risk learning means looking the world from outside of the academy. Analytical design processes should assume the complexity of reality. This non reductive approach was experimented through Party Project. Celebration is always a good way to motivate for a working process about openness. (fig.5)



Figure 5.

6) Avoid the appropriation of ideas. Thinking and knowledge should be shared to evolve the design towards more complex creative system. Speed dating is a technique to test this topic. 30 seconds to explain your idea to a third year student and receive feedback, done 30 times in 2 hours is a way to improve the idea, the creative process, open possibilities, and think further and deeper. (fig.6)



Figure 6. Figure 7.

7) Consideration of architecture as a mediation between human beings and nature. Development of the sense of responsibility on sustainable and inclusive processes that consider both the service to citizenship and the relationship with the planet (Fig.7)

8) *Arcimbolding*, designing from fragmentation. Organize, structure and hierarchize are design project actions. Robert Venturi addressed the concept of part-to-whole, defining the ingredients of an organization as 'elements, links and the difficulty to connect the whole' (Ibañez, 2015: 9). Therefore, designing is to discover these links between parts and the whole. This pedagogy explores design processes from fragmentation and assembly. Our referencies were italian painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo (Milán, 1527-1593) and the concept of Knolling. ABK movement (*Always be Knolling*) recognizes this impulse about organizing objects that share some concept. Knolling can be considered as a design technique, it was coined by Tom Sach while working at Frank Gehry's office designing furniture for Knoll.

After a first self-exploration that consisted in making a plaster sculpture of oneself head (fig 8), students brought to classroom objects from garbage containers. They had to build with them a new replica of their head (fig 9). The action began with a market where each student could steal a piece from another.

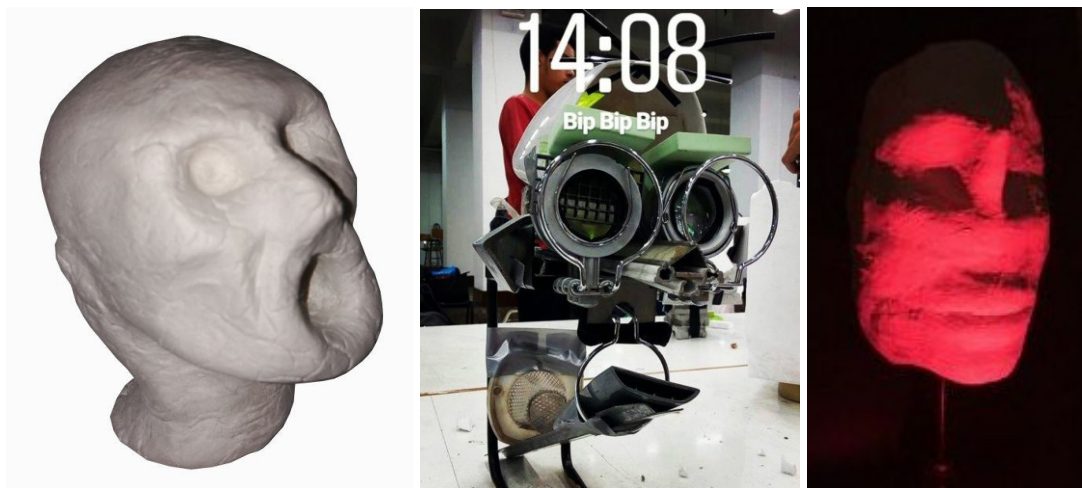


Figure 8. Figure 9. Figure 10.

9) Mind and body working together in a scenario of freedom with no censures and rules but respect for diversity. Monstering, designing the specific, was an action to explore this dual issue (Fig. 10). It began with a theoretical introduction where we presented the concept of monster as a creature that intensifies its personality with an exceptional and specific condition. Above this theoretical background, each student had to discover each own ability and intensify it as a superpower. A monster collection became alive.

Afterwards, each student had to design and build a mechanic hand prosthesis that should allow to implement the superpower. This new body extension should be designed through waste objects assembly. Finally, a session was dedicated to register these projects with drawings and pictures in a sort of exhibition in a big central table.

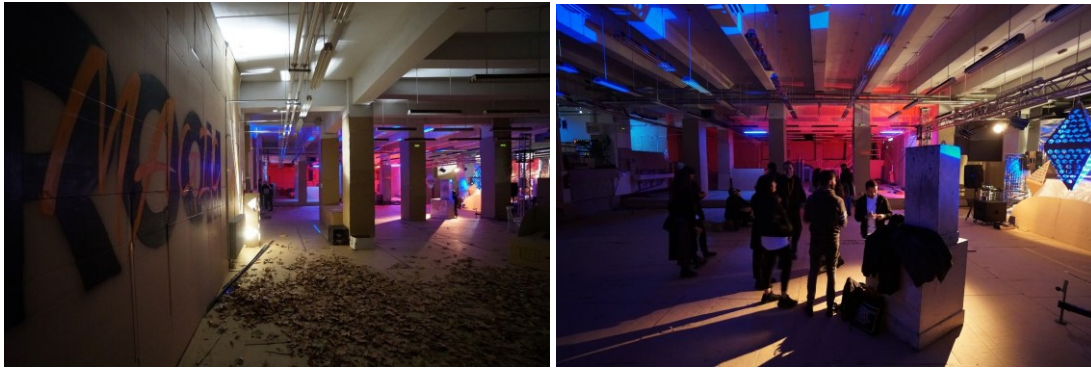


Figure 11. Figure 12.

10) Empowerment of first-year students as real architects. The millennial generation belongs to the maker culture. They have the capacity to approach the project process from the beginning to its construction. This was the core of Magic Project, a total pedagogy developed by the students (Figs 11-12). After a competition process between teams of 4-5 students, the winning design project proposed to cover the entire classroom with cardboard and design a party.

5. Conclusions

Our role is to create the necessary conditions to make educational the students' experience (Saenz Obregón, 2004, 44). To make the students provoke leaks in the action and in the plane of thinking, only indicates the need for the concepts to be revised or even to explode and change the direction of the experience.

We are not sure about the method or the teaching strategy we do. It may be also provokes the contrary: turning adult architecture students into

never-ending children, unable to decide, to assume responsibilities or to lead their own life's where they want.

There must be a way to change how to teach creativity in architecture school, without having emotional troubles, having fun and learning a lot, and this is probably returning to connect our unconscious part of the brain with our primary emotions. Being less rational and more instinctive, more animals, losing the fear of not being recognised by others, not receiving likes, and not suffering for that, because the creativity comes up with freedom and love.

There is still a long road to walk to get results and demonstrate that unlearning from everything we learn about "how to do things, how to create", and doing it with the right side of the brain instead of the left side, being more emotional and less rational, connecting with our most inner emotions, and avoiding fear, must be something good in order to create without barriers, and with freedom.

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Biography

Ángela Ruiz Plaza. PhD Cum Laude in Architecture Polytechnic University of Madrid (2015). MBA (2016). DEA (Advance research Diploma (2009). MArch UPM + École de La Vilette Paris. (2006)

Associate professor in Polytechnic University of Madrid (since 2012), Universidad Antonio de Nebrija (since 2010) and IE University (since 2006), she teaches Architectural drawing, Design, and Graphic Expression subjects. Director of Internship Program at IE University. Professor in MACA (Master of Communication in Architecture). Member in Innovative Education and Hypermedia research groups. She has been invited Professor in the Ural State Technical University of Ekaterinburg (Russia), Amar Telidji University of Laghouat (Argelia), Technical University of Crete, Xaniá (Greece), the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, University of Nis (Serbia), University of Technology in Kaunas (Lithuania) and Politechnika Lodzka University, Lodz (Poland).

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Atxu Amann Alcocer. Tenured professor at the UPM since 1988. At ETSAM, he is the head researcher of the consolidated Hypermedia Research Group: Workshop of Architectural Configuration and Communication, director of Maca Master in Architectural Communication, and the responsible of DOca - Doctorate Studies in Architectural Communication. She has directed numerous Diploma projects, Master's and Doctoral Theses (more than 30), especially in research lines related to gender, teaching, communication and housing, all of them with a marked transversal character linking humanities with architecture. She counts more than 70 publications and conferences, more than 70 projects of R&D&I, and more than 40 supervisions, having in her outstanding experience.

She founded Temperaturas extremas Studio in 1988 with Andrés Cánovas and Nicolas Maruri that have got more than 100 awards, specially in projects related to housing. This year 2018 she has been the curator of the Spanish pavilion in Venice Biennale.

Eduardo Roig. PhD architect by the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid UPM and PhD assistant Lecturer (ANECA 2015), his career is linked together by three very interwoven roles: teacher, researcher, and practicing architect. He combines his practice as CEO at COMBO Lab office with teaching in UPM, Universidad de Alcalá and ESNE School of Design.

He has been visiting Profesor at Budapest University of Technology and Economics (HU), Sapienza Università di Roma (IT), Technical University of Munich (DE), NYSID (USA), Raffles International College (Hong Kong) and American University of Sharjah (EA). He has worked as coordinator for Spanish Council of Architects (CSCAE) at the European project EDUCATE (Environmental Design in University Curricula and Architectural Training) and has been contracted as scientific expert evaluator at Horizon 2020 EU Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.